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# SUCCESS STORY

## Empowering Citizens with Knowledge of Charters



A former VDC member expresses her views during a planning session for a Citizen Charter advocacy campaign.



Youth participate in a group orientation on Citizen Charters.

*In August 2006, the U.S. Agency for International Development's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) began a 2-year, \$15,000,000 program in Nepal to bolster the current peace process, strengthen governance mechanisms, and support positive, nonviolent community engagement in the country's political, social, and economic future. OTI has extended the program for a third year with an additional \$10,000,000. The objectives of the program are to:*

- 1. Increase access to information and diversify public debate on issues critical to political transition, and*
- 2. Increase local-level engagement and participation in the peace process.*

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**November 2008** – The seating of the Constituent Assembly and the formation of a new government have raised Nepali citizens' expectations of government. They are looking for better services from line agencies and are expecting political parties and government officials to engage in participatory and transparent democratic practices.

In Nepal, every government office has a Citizen Charter (CC) that describes the services the office is required to provide and the activities it has planned. In many areas, however, the CCs are not widely publicized and, therefore, not well understood. Since citizens are often unaware of the services a government office is responsible for, they are unable to effectively advocate for themselves and their communities. Consequently, communities do not receive services that they are entitled to and citizens lose confidence in the mechanisms of governance.

To provide information about government responsibilities and engage citizens in civic processes, the Office of Transition Initiatives partnered with Sahakarya Nepal to produce and disseminate easy-to-comprehend booklets to increase citizen awareness and understanding of CCs. In addition, the grantee sponsored various awareness-raising programs and campaigns in three central Terai districts to teach residents – adults and youth – about CC provisions.

The initiative has empowered communities to watch over government budgets and the process by which money is allocated for development projects. Since the activity, residents are increasingly vocal about funding, which is often misused by authorities. In one village, a youth mobilization group conducted a social audit of a construction project and retrieved funds that were misappropriated by the construction committee.

The activity has not only engaged people at the grassroots level but also convinced some local officials to provide the public with accurate information on government services, which has improved relationships between officials and their constituents. A Village Development Committee (VDC) secretary in Parsa district said that the CC booklet has helped him become more responsive. He said residents are now aware of the services that his office should provide as well as the requirements that must be met to receive them.

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